

Standing Orders: Carter's Tale

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Summary: Noble One. The Commander of Noble. Carter was born a leader, raised as a Spartan, and died a hero. This is a testament to his sacrifice, and a record of his influence on Noble Team.

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****August 30, 2552, Sinoviet ship breaking facility, Aszod, Reach****

Carter's knuckles were white beneath his gauntlets as he gripped the controls of the Pelican, fighting the darkness that bordered his vision as he wrenched the yoke desperately, doing his best to keep the damaged Pelican in the air just a little while longer. His helmet was off, but it did nothing to prevent the sweat beading on his brow. Every so often, a hacking cough would begin from deep in his chest, and as he fought to get it under control, some blood would pool in his throat and bubble up into his mouth. Ignoring the pain that tore through his chest, Carter would simply spit out the blood and refocus his attention to the controls. The Banshees pursuing him would occasionally land a shot that nearly hit him in his place in the cockpit, but he would ignore it. Then, he got his chance, as the Banshees accelerated past his Pelican, presenting their tailfins for his mounted guns' sights. He thumbed the trigger built into the yoke, and the dual-mounted chainguns roared to life, the auto-targeting systems locking onto the closest Banshee and bringing it down in a hail of armor-piercing rounds.

As the first Banshee exploded in a cloud of blue and purple plasma, Carter removed his thumb from the trigger, ceasing the fire and allowing the chainguns to lock onto the next target. Carter let a ghost of a smile frame his face as the second Banshee met a similar fate, detonating like a bomb and sending its flaming wreck careening into the Cliffside. Carter watched the debris of the Banshee tumble

down the cliff for a moment before casting his gaze forward, toward the ground to check on Six and Emile's progress. The Pillar of Autumn stood like a beacon on the horizon, and Carter guessed the two were about a klick and a half from their goal. Suddenly, a titanic figure crawled around a nearby rock formation, and Carter's smile faded.

The figure was shaped like a monstrous insect, with four jointed legs supporting its frame, and a massive cannon mounted on its back. It glittered in an amber hue, its reflective purple armor catching the dying sunlight. It was a Scarab, the Covenant's strongest ground unit, and it was on a direct path toward Six and Emile's position. Carter raised a hand to his head, placing a finger against his ear and activating the COM unit planted deep in his ear canal. "Nobleâ€¦ You've got a-" He grunted in pain as another spear of agony buried itself in his chest. "-Situation."

The two caught sight of the Scarab, and Carter heard Emile grunt "Mother-" over the COM link before he caught himself, stating firmly, "We can get past it, sir!"

Carter sighed in resignation, realizing what had to be done. "No you can't." He said dejectedly. "Not without help."

Emile's voice was a mix of concern, shock, and skepticism. "Commander, you don't have the firepower." The Scarab meanwhile was charging up its cannon, aiming at the section of cliff where Six and Emile now stood. Carter quickly thumbed the trigger once more, and allowed the chainguns to pepper the Scarab's hull with bullets. They caused no real damage, but it did cause the Scarab to cringe like an animal in pain, disrupting its aim and focusing its attention on Carter's Pelican.

As Carter flew over the Scarab's hull, he responded grimly, "I've got the mass."

He began to bring the Pelican about in a wide circle as plasma bolts splashed against its side. Emile's voice was neutral, a dead tone that worked both to mask and express his grief. "Solid Copy. Hit 'em hard, boss."

The Pelican was now facing the Scarab, which had returned its attention to the two Spartans on the ground. Carter pushed the throttle forward, sending the Pelican into a burning nosedive towards the Scarab. He thumbed the trigger again, sending bullets into the rapidly approaching Scarab. Confidence suffused Carter's tone as he gave his final message. "You're on your own, Noble. Carter out." The Scarab filled the cockpit's view screen, and Carter shut his eyes as he waited for the impact. Despite common belief, Carter's life did not flash before his eyes. Instead the last thing he saw was Kat, her lifeless body clutched in Six's arms as she emptied Kat's pistol into the Phantom dropship above her, and his last feeling was a twinge of regret in his chest, a worse pain than any his wounds had managed to create. Then a flash consumed his vision, and Carter, the Commander of Noble team, was engulfed in a massive explosion.

****Aftermath****

Noble Six watched in stoic silence as the pelican exploded against

the surface of the Scarab, sending the titanic machine sprawling from the impact, small fires popping up all along its form. The mechanical monster began to struggle to its feet, its multijointed legs shaking with the effort, before collapsing in on themselves, as the Scarab erupted in an enormous plume of superheated plasma.

As the remains of the Scarab tumbled down a cliff, Six tore her gaze from it and turned it towards Emile. The Spartan was standing like a monolith, motionless as he watched the Scarab's husk disappear over the Cliffside. He remained still for several moments, simply staring motionlessly. Then, just as Six was about to rouse him from his thoughts, he turned to her and muttered, "Crevice to the East. Let's go." Noble Six, a Spartan known simply as a hyper-lethal-vector to most, and a grim reaper to others, felt perturbed at the smoldering hate in Emile's voice, and could only nod in response. Emile made his way forward, towards the formation he had pointed out previously. Six turned toward the cliff the Scarab had disappeared over. She paused, and then gave a crisp salute, before turning back to Emile and moving to follow.

The two Spartans continued on in silence, making their way into the nearby cave system Emile had spotted previously. Six was used to silence, it was her constant companion during her time as a "Lone Wolf." The phrase sent a spasm of pain through her chest, recalling Carter's first conversation with her.

I've read your file; even the parts ONI censors didn't want me to. I'm glad to have your skill set. But we're a team. That Lone Wolf stuff; stays behind. Clear?

_ Got it, sir._

Her response had been disdainful, bordering on sarcastic. She worked best on her own. Or so she thought. Over the course of her campaign on Reach, she had come to realize how valuable her new teammates had become. Without them, she would surely have died several times over. Carter's sacrifice was just one particularly unfortunate example. Six cast away her thoughts and instead looked up toward Emile. The skull-faced Spartan had been silent since Carter's Pelican had crashed, save for the occasional direction. Even his usual jibes and curses during combat were gone, the few Covenant they had encountered having been decimated in a wordless stupor. Speeding up into a light jog, Six drew level with Emile, the Warrant Officer sparing her a glance but otherwise saying nothing. Six sighed. It was clear that any sort of communication would have to be initiated by her.

Gathering what little empathy she could, Six asked, "How are you holding up?" Emile shot her another glance, but otherwise remained silent. Pressing further, Six prompted, "He saved us, you know. If it weren't for him, we would have been killed. He died a hero." This brought out a reaction from the Spartan, one Six had not expected: A bitter laugh. "Yeah, that's a real fuckin' comfort. Died a hero, just so we can go and get killed later."

Six was stunned. Never had she heard this kind of pessimism from Emile before, or from any Spartan. They were Humanity's last defense; they couldn't afford to give up hope. With the world on their shoulders, the idea of simply giving up seemed impossible. Six couldn't stand to see Emile like this. "We aren't dead yet, and our

mission isn't over. We need to get this AI to the _Autumn_."

Emile scoffed again. "And then what? Do you think that AI is gonna save us? Look at this Six, it's over. They won." Emile had stopped his march, turning toward the edge of a nearby cliff, the vast valley of Aszod splayed out before them. Following his gaze, Six had to admit the picture looked grim. The entire valley, once filled with the healthy green of rolling plains of grass, was now a dirty, dusty brown. Ash hung thickly in the air, drifting down like macabre snow. In the distance, a Covenant ship could be seen glassing what was left of the habitable land, reducing its surface to glass.

The pair stood in silence for a moment until Emile turned away, continuing on towards the _Autumn._ Six gave the scorched landscape a final glance before moving to follow.

End
file.